

Reprinted from Database Marketing Magazine

What Marketing Needs From IT

By Simon Daniels

It's well known that Sales and Marketing are like cats and dogs in many companies. Constant conflicts take place over the value of marketing activity, the quality of leads and their subsequent follow-up and the appropriate assignment of credit for opportunities that result in new business wins. These issues are much discussed and suggested solutions abound.

What though, of the relationship between Marketing and IT? Technology is crucial to modern marketing in the form of database systems, campaign automation, digital and interactive platforms, analytics and much more. We turn to our IT colleagues for solutions in these areas to help us manage customer lifecycle, campaign execution, measurement and many other aspects of marketing activity. Alongside systems deemed business critical in finance and operations though, Marketing is often afforded lower priority and left to fend for itself.

The response of IT to requests from Marketing for additional resources often revolves around their need to focus on "core functions", but what are these functions? "As all experienced marketers will be aware," wrote Antony Begley in September's "Database Marketing" supplement "Managing Customer Data in a Recession," "the IT department's requirements differ from those of Marketing." Clearly IT has many demands placed on it from across any business. Systems relating to financial management and service delivery will always occupy a high profile position, even against those generating and tracking demand for a company's products and services. The tendency among IT organisations though is a desire to retain ownership of as much of the technology deployed within the business as possible, to define everything as a project and then submit each initiative to a review board for justification and approval.

Marketing's requirements are often much simpler than this and do not represent the same level of risk as other enterprise systems, which may be intrinsically mission critical. The rising prevalence of hosted and Software-as-a-Service ("SaaS") solutions means these needs can be met in a much lighter-touch way, without involving substantial infrastructure development and capital expenditure. This was undoubtedly not the case until even a few years ago, but the realm of "what's possible" moves on. Marketing should be given more discretion over their own solutions, as long as considerations such as security and performance are given proper prominence.

This allows the role of IT to become that of creating an environment where these solutions can be rapidly selected and deployed. Core IT skills such as requirements definition, vendor assessment and selection and project management remain invaluable, and should continue to be embraced by Marketing. This is where true value add can be achieved, as what Marketing requires is a trusted partner to act as guide and facilitator through the many external solutions available and their most effective deployment.



The key point here is that there is an abundance of hosted solutions meeting the needs of Marketing that are just waiting to be “switched on” once the right one is identified. IT is then relieved of the burden of creating the environment for a new system (servers, networking, backups), installing software, handling upgrades and so on. This is frequently where the time, expense and IT staff resource is consumed, leading to extended lead times for delivery or the assignment of lower priority to marketing initiatives.

Whether a marketing system is internal or hosted though, integration with other systems across the business remains crucial. This is especially the case with CRM or Salesforce Automation applications, where these exist. Sharing contact data, passing leads and tracking the end-to-end relationship with prospects and customers is key to maintaining customer centricity. Again though, the latest solutions, utilising web services and other techniques, can be readily and rapidly interconnected, enabling this joined-up vision and allowing best of breed solutions to be selected for the appropriate areas of the business. Often, this integration only involves a configuration task and not the custom development that might have been necessary in the past.

Clearly the arguments in favour of outsourcing are well rehearsed and Sales and Marketing represent a particularly good fit for this model. Indeed, Marketing has long taken an independent approach, utilising bureaux to externally host and process prospect and customer data. This helps to explain why in-vogue concepts such as “cloud computing” seem to be just business-as-usual, since data held and managed offsite is actually nothing new to marketers. Marketing’s embrace of SaaS solutions is a natural evolution of long held practices.

In this scenario, the “core function” for IT can then become one of enablement, fostering an environment in which fit-for-purpose solutions can be rapidly identified, deployed and integrated. The growing contingent of highly capable, technically literate marketing operations professionals can take it from there, combining the best of both worlds. These “hybrid” individuals are as equally comfortable handling the commercially orientated and fluid requirements of Marketing, as they are detailed and rigorous IT considerations. Supported by IT where necessary, but with the right level of autonomy as well, Marketing can become far more self-sufficient.

There’s no reason that Marketing and IT can’t play nicely, with everyone capitalising on their strengths and ensuring the best outcome for companies and their customers. This is clearly in everyone’s interest, allowing Marketing to focus on being responsive and results orientated and IT to apply resources where similar solutions are not so readily available for other functions. Now, how to achieve the same result with Marketing and Sales...



About the Author:



Simon Daniels has managed initiatives in database management, marketing automation system implementation, CRM and SFA system implementation, marketing data enhancement, data quality management, analytics and privacy policy. He is founder of Percassity Marketing Data Solutions and is Marketing Operations Partners' representative in EMEA. To find out more, please contact Simon at simon.daniels@mopartners.com.